

Reece Jones, *Violent Borders. Refugees and the Right to Move*

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Reece Jones is Professor of Geography at the University of Hawaii in Manoa. His latest book offers an interesting insight on the notion of borders, understood as territorial limits. His previous book¹ compared the resort to walls in the Israeli-Palestinian context, at the US-Mexico borderlands and at the borderline between India and Bangladesh. It explored critically links between border militarisation and the global war on terror. It analysed official justifications of these walls as a similar reaction of the Israeli, Indian and US States against infiltration of potential 'terrorists'. The book also demonstrated how such policies establish regimes of violence and exclusion.

Following these first explorations, his new book *Violent Borders* rather provides a systemic answer to why the response to people movement is State violence at the borders. The scope of analysis stretches to other cases of border militarisation (e.g. Australia, the Mediterranean and Burma). The ambition of the book is to analyse the issue of violence against human movement as a conflict between people who move around, according to their desire for freedom, and people who want them to stay in place expressing a desire to control (p. 10). In other words, the State violence at borders is presented as emblematic of a broader system that "seeks to preserve privilege and opportunity by restricting access to resources and movement for others" (p. 5). Reece Jones names this system the global border regime. The demonstration disputes the idea that borders are a natural part of the human world, and that their militarisation is justified by control of external threats, as State narratives claim. Instead, the existence of a border itself produces the violence that surrounds it: "The hardening of the border through new security practices is the source of the violence, not a response to it" (p. 5).

Borders are thus considered as inherently violent. Reece Jones draws from Galtung's apprehension of direct and structural violence², as well as Tyner and Inwood's³ article on who carries violence. He lists five forms of systematic border violence: 1) from guards and border security infrastructure; 2) due to chances of injury, deaths or deprivation while crossing the limit; 3) from threat of violence when

1 Reece Jones, *Border Walls, Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India, and Israel* (London, New York: Zed Books, 2012).

2 Johan Galtung, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research', *Journal of Peace Research*, 6 (1969), pp. 167–191.

3 James Tyner and Joshua Inwood, 'Violence as Fetish: Geography, Marxism, and Dialectics', *Progress in Human Geography*, 38 (2014), pp. 771–785.

limiting the access to areas or resources through an enclosure; 4) from deprivation of the global poor of access to wealth and opportunities through the bordering of States; 5) in the direct harm of borders to the environment.

Based on field research, interviews, participant observation by crossing boundaries, documentation of security practices, as well as analysis of government documents, reports and speeches, the book describes the different forms of violence characterising the contemporary global border regime. It does that in seven chapters and a concluding one calling to challenge the inherent violence of the global border regime.

The first chapter depicts the militarisation of the Mediterranean sea and the so-called 'migration crisis' of 2015. After presenting the process of militarising the sea, Reece Jones argues that framing movement as a human-trafficking issue is misleading because the violence and deaths at sea are coming from the movement restriction imposed by regulations from the European Union and its member-states.

The second chapter traces the history of the hardening of the US-Mexico border and its progressive conversion to a 'war zone'. The militarisation of the border is described as the visible part of a Security State that prevents movement by violence.

The third chapter enlarges the scope to Israel, India, Bangladesh and Australia and their respective border enforcement efforts to control movements. In this chapter, the author refines his notion of a global border regime. To do so, he attacks Wendy Brown's⁴ main thesis on walls arguing that the weakening of State sovereignty leads States to resort to walls to reaffirm their power facing globalisation flows. According to him, the militarisation of borders corresponds, instead, to a rearticulation and expansion of State power. Regulations of movements are part of a long-term conflict between States and people who move. Different modes of controls across time (slavery, serfdom) served that purpose. Now, it takes the form of the global border regime with the same desire to protect privileges accrued through the control of resources and opportunities.

This definition leads to the fourth chapter dedicated to the forms of restrictions imposed on migration since the nineteenth century by the development of a legal regime of citizenship and identity documents that nowadays constitutes a crucial element of the global border regime. Jones presents a rapid history of movement restrictions from slavery to serfdom, to the governmentality of movements by identity documents and passports. Such a move has progressively ascribed everyone to a place and an identification of belonging. It has also restricted movement in order to contain labour.

Chapter five deals with the organisation of space into a global system of territorial and resources control, backed up with the threat of violence. Territoriality implies claiming an area, and enforcing that claim with a system that limits access to the area through movement restrictions or violence, which is part of the efforts of States to control resources. To illustrate that point, the author is drawing from the fight over property of the common lands during the Midland revolt in England in 1607, from the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 introducing the modern system of States as bounded units, to the colonisation move exporting that model to the rest of the world, to the most recent enclosure of oceans. These different historical moments represent clear examples of the structural violence of borders linked to resources control.

4 Wendy Brown, *Walled states, waning sovereignty* (Cambridge, US & London, UK: the MIT Press, 2010).

Chapter six discusses the economic function of borders. They have also been hardened to prevent the movement of workers and create piecemeal national regulations that corporations can manipulate (p. 122). Jones tells a global history from a bounded world economy to a globalised one where multinational corporations establish factories in the cheapest place possible and then ship goods across borders.

In chapter seven, Reece Jones explains how border making harms the environment. For instance, he refers to separation fences disrupting the habitats of animals. Moreover, he criticises the impact of interstate agreements on global warming such as the 2015 Paris conference. The frame of multilateral agreement between sovereign states (unequally responsible for global warming) is doomed to fail, because the issue is global and does not mind State boundaries.

In the conclusion, Reece Jones challenges the global system based on bordered States inherently producing violence to regulate movements in their territories and beyond. The State is presented as a boundary-making institution that legitimises the exclusion of others from land, resources, wealth, and opportunity through legal regimes and military power. Jones expresses the need for a radical redefinition of what the nation-state is. He suggests opening borders to allow free movement, determining global rules for working conditions and for environmental protection, and limiting private property.

If the presentation of various borderlands is not new for border and migration scholars (though many good historical descriptions would satisfy the newcomer on border issues), this book deserves to be read due to its ambition: theorising the systemic violence at borders against human movement. Border scholars have debated over the possibility to theorise the bordering process. For instance, Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly answers yes: "[Border theory] will allow us to compare borders according to similarities and differences and to categorise borders and borderland regions. Such a comparison will also allow us to escape the current view that each border is unique and that no taxonomy of border is conceptually feasible because there are too many types of borders⁵". Geographer Anssi Paasi is more doubtful as he understands the bordering process as overly contextual and particular⁶. Reece Jones's book has to be situated on the 'yes' side of this theorising effort. Assuming a committed position against the violence of the global border regime, he offers a well-illustrated demonstration of the inherent violence of such a regime to control global movement in order to preserve privileges. The book indeed participates in the current questioning⁷ of the redefinition of the political and economic functions of the process of bordering, both at the geopolitical level and in terms of social practices and cultural productions of exclusion.

5 Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, 'Theorizing Borders: an interdisciplinary Perspective', *Geopolitics*, vol. 10, n°4 (2005), p. 644.

6 Anssi Paasi, 'Borders, theory and the challenge of relational thinking', *Political Geography*, n°30 (2011), pp. 62–63.

7 Sandro Mezzadra & Brett Neilson, *Border as method, or, the multiplication of labor* (Duke University Press, 2013); Elisabeth Vallet, *Borders, Fences and Walls. State of Insecurity?* (Ashgate, London, UK, 2014); Nancy A. Naples & Jennifer Bickhan Mendez (eds.), *Border Politics: Social Movements, Collective Identities, and Globalization* (New York University Press, 2015).